

Strong support from the scientific community to the idea of establishing a European Research Council within the Life Sciences

In October 2002, the Danish presidency of the European Commission (EC) organised a meeting in Copenhagen to discuss the perspectives in establishing a European Research Council (ERC), complementary to the EC Framework programmes and National Research Council programmes. As the ERC will focus on supporting high quality basic research, it is considered to be an important instrument for strengthening the European Research Area (ERA).

The Summary Report of the Copenhagen meeting was sent to the EU ministers for research, who at their November 26 meeting agreed to explore options for its creation, in co-operation with relevant national and European research organisations. As a result, Helge Sander, the Danish Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation appointed Federico Mayor, ex Director General of UNESCO and member of the Executive Committee of FEBS, to chair an expert group that will present various options on how to create an ERC by the end of 2003.

Recently, leaders of the scientific community, including Nobel Laureates, met in UNESCO, Paris, France, for a meeting organised by the European Life Sciences Forum on behalf of several organisations, to discuss the prospects of creating such an ERC. Various stakeholders (EC, research councils, foundations, and international organisations) attended the meeting. There was an overall support for the establishment of an ERC, and in particular, Commissioner Busquin's full support of the idea was greatly appreciated by the participants. Many

obstacles related to funding and structure were identified, but there was a clear willingness to join forces to make a reality of this now mature idea. A summary of the conclusions will be circulated shortly, and a follow-up meeting to discuss concrete initiatives is being planned for the summer.

Needless to say, this initiative will have a major impact on basic research, as it is expected to help Europe realize its full scientific potential, and the ultimate dream of becoming a knowledge-based society. You are encouraged to contribute to the success of establishing an ERC by making national authorities aware of your support, and by letting your ideas be known through relevant channels (e.g. via the FEBS or ELSO website, www.febs.org and www.the-elso-gazette.org, respectively).

As far as FEBS is concerned, we are committed to work for the realization of an ERC, and we have recently established a working group on ERA that will focus on that. In addition to members of the Executive Committee, this working group includes P. Chambon, A. Finazzi Agro, J.M. Gago, F. Kafatos, M. Lazdunski, C. Martinez-A, D. McConnell, W. Neupert, M. Osborn, V. Paces and P. Van der Vliet. The group will start its activities shortly.

Julio E. Celis
Secretary General of the Federation of European
Biochemical Societies (FEBS)
President of the European Life Sciences Forum (ELSF)